

MARC'S SENSORY OASIS

Sensory-based Occupational Therapy

www.otmarclandry.com



CHILDREN ARE PRECIOUS!

These are typically not about behavior or discipline, and punishment is not the answer!

THESE ARE TRAUMATIC FOR YOUR CHILD!

Schools do not always meet the sensory needs of children and can cause severe dysregulation! How can this be prevented?

There are more and more sensory sensitive children in our schools. These are children who take in information that others miss, they absorb every sensory detail in the environment until they are frazzled, with brains swimming in stress hormones. Many children will tune out vast amounts of sensory information, like bulletin boards, fluorescent glare, background chatter, vibration and buzzing, strange smells, seams in clothes, etc. When you can not tune out enough chatter, your brainstem is in sensory overload, like me trying to think in the produce section of Superstore on a

Saturday! Simple sensory overload causes stress hormones to build as the day goes on. One of the greatest tools we have to dissipate this unfocused sensory stress and the related hormones, is movement and fidgeting!

Children in our schools do not get enough movement, do not get movement on an individualized schedule or plan. Many smart kids who want to please their adults learn early on that adults do not like kids who move too much. Most children do not get movement needs met, from a self regulation perspective. I have

SENSORY SMARTS

You can help to build Sensory Smarts in your school community. When you do this, you will be helping many kids who fall between the cracks in terms of support and just have a hard time in the movement deprived style of education. IDEAS:

- Encourage the Parent Association to buy some hokki stools for each grade. Once teachers experience them, the school will buy them to replace broken chairs
- Encourage the Parent Association to buy sensory equipment for a Sensory Room, Self-Regulation Room, Re-set Room where learners can go for a short break
- Ask a local OT to talk to your parent group about sensory and self regulation ideas
- Support, learn, and use the language of Zones of Regulation in your school and in your home
- Build relationships with sensory smart OT and PT staff, resource teachers, administrators.
- Ask your school or group to host my sensory talk next October, 2019.

dedicated newsletters to the importance of movement, and you can find these on the Newsletter page of my website (Nov. 2015, Dec 2016).

Three factors which build up to meltdowns include:

- ☑ Sensory overload - crowded, noisy, close, bright settings
- ☑ Lack of ongoing or periodic and intense movement and heavy work options
- ☑ Desire to fit in, follow rules

These are related to each other in a positive and negative ways. For example, if the child is extremely sensory sensitive and the environment is too busy, the child will require more movement and heavy work than in a calmer setting. Learners may deny their needs if they feel singled out and want to appear to be "like everyone else".

Because there is a lot going on in terms of sensory processing and the school setting, not every day will be the same. Many days, the child will be able to manage life at school within functional expectations.

Sometimes, the child will begin to fall apart as soon as s/he sees her/his parent, often the meltdown will occur in the car, and at times everything will be fine until you get home.

Parent, car, and home should all be safe places in the mind of a child. A child that has to expend massive amounts of energy to keep stress hormones at bay and manage behavior despite their effects can drop their guard when they feel "safe" again. This is not really a choice, but rather a need to be able to let go and decompress - to self regulate. But because self regulation opportunities have not been available or not been enough, the child is just barely holding it together during the school day.

These kids are often very sensory sensitive, and/or driven to fit in and very motivated to manage themselves in front of teachers and peers. The fact that your child waits for you to let loose is a sign of a positive relationship.

Sometimes, people at the school will see the meltdown

ADULTS WERE INVENTED TO KEEP KIDS SAFE!

Safe House!

You want to build an inventory of **SENSORY SMART** options that will allow your child to dissipate energy and shake off the day's energy! Possibilities:

- Stay at the school for a time after school and allow your child to run around the field or play on the equipment.
- Have a snack in the car and some child friendly music. Even a short video can help to melt the day's stress
- Do not demand the child be still or start homework right away
- Add a couple after school "tasks" that involve heavy work: dig a hole, drag a trash or leaf bag, carry non breakable groceries, drag the garden hose to a new spot, carry a heavy watering can
- Sensory play time: dig in wet sand, use a swing or backyard trampoline, ride a bike, have a pillow fight, do some push ups.
- DO your best to make sure there is 30 minutes of movement and activity before any sedentary activities.
- Make after school snacks extra crunchy, cold, tart, sour. Really crisp pickles or carrot sticks are great!
- Listen to your child and discover sensory clues as to what helps them and what pushes them closer to the edge.

Don't Punish Meltdowns



- Many people mistakenly see the child as oppositional and purposely acting out.
- For true meltdowns the child loses self control and is not being oppositional.
- Punishment works if child has some degree of control over the behavior.
- When stress chemicals reach boiling point, child has to act to reduce the chemicals.
- Trying to counsel, scold, or reason during meltdown is usually ineffective, due to breakdown in reasoning skills.
- Child is often remorseful after calming.

coming, sometimes not. Often, schools will react to this issue by saying "junior is fine at school, so school is not the problem, look at other causes for the meltdowns." It can genuinely be hard to see the connection here, without knowing the child's sensory processing style and level of sensory sensitivity, which most educators are not trained in.

This situation is best handled through best practices for self regulation throughout the day, as it is best to help the school understand the situation and become part of the solution. I have also discussed in several newsletters what it is like to be a sensory sensitive child in a busy school, and those newsletters will give you some ideas that might help.

Sometimes, having dynamic seating, like a hokki stool or ECR4kids stool, or a standing desk will help to dissipate stress hormones continuously. For some kids, wearing noise reducers (at their choice) will be very helpful. If you have followed my newsletters or workshops, you can probably use your sensory detective skills to come up with strategies and options that will help if integrated into the school day. Please review past newsletters, and also consider looking over the "Quadrant" handouts on the Handout page

of my website for greater understanding and ideas.

I worked with a child who desperately needed movement during the day, but would not use playground equipment at recess because of the level of activity and the typical chaos of the recess environment. While the school did not initially think her after school meltdowns were a school issue, they did support bringing this girl out to an empty playground toward the end of the school day. The meltdowns stopped happening in the parking lot and the car, immediately. She still became agitated at home once the home routine began. What she really needed was some extra movement and heavy work to reset her system. She was given play and work options that included moving heavy things, digging, jumping on a trampoline. After about 20 minutes of movement and heavy work, she was ready to have a snack and begin her homework routine.

We also worked to integrate more options for movement and heavy work into her school day. She learned to use fidgets, sit on her hands, and use her hands to push herself up from her chair or the floor, giving heavy work. We got her a hokki stool for dynamic seating, and she was able to visit a sensory room for some movement, or deliver

a heavy box to the office. Soon, the after school meltdowns faded away.

I don't believe there is ever a magic bullet that fixes this, but I do know that pretending it is behavior and the child is behaving this way on purpose is the wrong way to go. It causes a child to be self critical, depressed, and disconnected, and these lead to greater psychosocial problems.

A child learning to feel the energy build in his body can request activities that will help. A child can learn to use fidget tools, movement breaks, deep pressure and heavy work strategies, and to feel comfortable talking about how s/he feels and what s/he needs.

After school meltdowns are much more common as schools become crowded, the sensory environment gets more hostile, and toxins in foods and environments cause more children to be sensory sensitive and to have sensory needs that are not compatible with a sitting down style of education. Some schools are becoming more sensory smart, and providing sensory rooms and sensory pathways in their hallways, for example. Being Sensory Smart is the answer, when applied with a healthy dose of love.

Resources to learn more about after school meltdowns:

<https://parentingfromtheheartblog.com/after-school-meltdown-self-regulation/>

<https://www.oakvillefamilyinstitute.com/after-school-meltdowns/>

<https://www.thepragmaticparent.com/navigating-the-after-school-meltdown/>

<http://www.pbs.org/parents/expert-tips-advice/2016/09/cope-school-meltdowns/>

<https://www.thechaosandtheclutter.com/archives/after-school-meltdown-strategy-works>

<https://www.merakilane.com/the-after-school-emotional-meltdown-15-preventative-tips-for-parents/>

<https://www.positiveparentingconnection.net/7-ideas-to-prevent-after-school-meltdowns/>

<https://www.moms.com/after-school-meltdowns/>

What do you do when your child...

KEEPS IT TOGETHER IN SCHOOL AND MELTDOWNS AT HOME

Why does he/she do it?

- The school day is multi-sensory and places a large demand on a child's nervous system.
- They work hard to follow classroom rules and please teachers and staff members, all being trying to be "just like everyone else".
- So your child just may NEED to melt down, to release all that stress and anxiety in a safe place with non-judgmental people who love him/her.

How can I help my child?

- Understand that your child's day was overwhelming.
- Offer a place to "retreat" in order to help him unwind. This could include (but not limited to):
 - A quiet place indoors
 - An indoor swing moving in rhythmic motions
 - A large box full of pillows and covers
 - A quiet space with a bean bag and favorite toys
- Keep visual and auditory stimuli to a minimum.
- Provide full body pressure touch.
- Invert your child's head.
- Refrain from chores, homework, and other demand for an hour after-school.

Reference: Voss, Angie. *Understanding Your Child's Sensory Signals*. 2. 2013. eBook.

5 Sure-Fire Ways to Handle The After School Attitude

1. Greet Without The Questions.

"Would you like to tell me about your day now, or later?"

2. Feed Them A Healthy Snack

Get rid of HANGRY with fruit, yogurt, and veggies.

3. Allow for Down Time

Kids need time to relax and play after such a busy day.

4. Be Consistent with Rules and Routines

Children thrive when they know what's expected of them.

5. Connect and Reflect

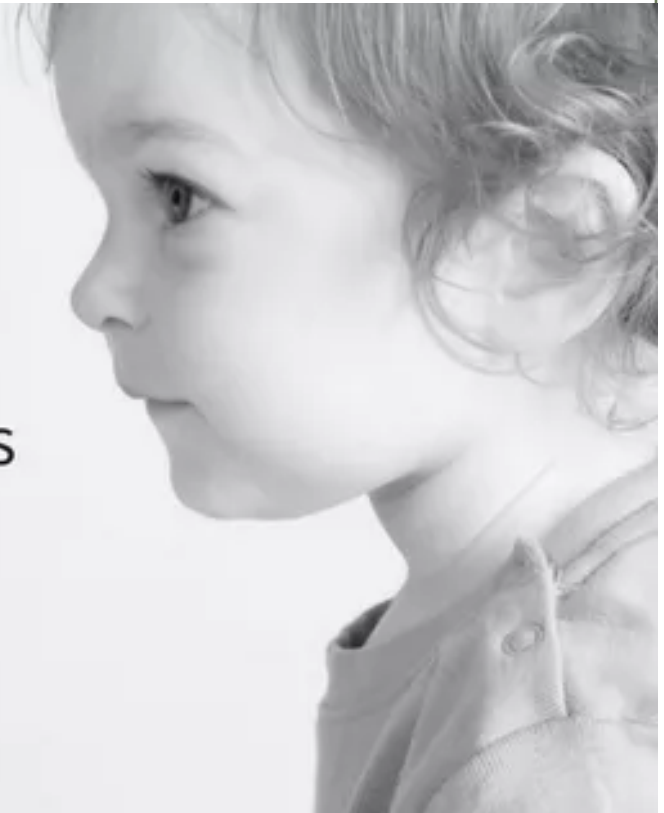
Spend 10-15min connecting and playing with your child.

www.scarymommy.com

After-School
Meltdowns Totally
Suck, But There's
Hope



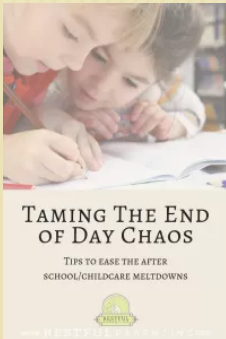
Listening to tears and offering guidance helps your child develop emotional resiliency.



Did You Know...

Your child's **meltdowns** when you pick them up from daycare may actually be a sign of a **healthy attachment**.

Playfully®



While they do not talk about getting the energy out with movement and heavy work, other ideas in this article are good!

<https://restfulparenting.com/parenting/taming-end-of-day-chaos>

Difficulties with transitions? Use plenty of warning and try a visual schedule, even if it's one you scribble on a scrap of paper. But also consider a visual timer, like the Time Timer™. And allow fidgets or sensory items during transitions. We are all human. Few people with a low neurological threshold like surprises!

